

VZCZCXRO2355

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBC RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDE RUEHDF RUEHDIR RUEHIK
RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNEH RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR
RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAA #0172 0350558
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 040558Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2253
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4787
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3031
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000172

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN AND INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL SNAR TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: STATE COUNTER NARCOTICS AGENCY SAYS
TRAINING IS MOST PRESSING NEED

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet
distribution.

¶2. (SBU) In a February 2 meeting, the acting director of the State Counter Narcotics Service (SCNS), Serdar Batyrov, told Political Officer and DEA Dushanbe Special Agent (SA) (currently temporarily assigned to Ashgabat) that his personnel urgently need training, both in Turkmenistan and, when possible, in the United States. Ninety percent of the staff at the one-year old Agency are new. He said that his Agency wants to profit from the "vast experience" that U.S. officials possess in the counter narcotics field. In addition to training opportunities, he said, the SCNS particularly needs material assistance and training with canine teams, as well as forensic techniques.

¶3. (SBU) Although Batyrov declined to elaborate when asked about Turkmenistan's main challenges in stemming the flow of Afghan opiates across its borders (he called the issue "outside the purview of his agency" and the responsibility, rather, of the State Border Service), he described his Agency's main tasks as battling the narcotics trade inside Turkmenistan and preventing and treating drug addiction among the Turkmen population. He was vague when asked to elaborate on the extent of the drug addiction problem in Turkmenistan, saying he "believed" that addicts number "around 30,000." (NOTE: 30,000 is the figure that the President's office announced publicly last year, although reliable sources within the NGO community believe that the number is much higher and the problem extremely widespread. END NOTE.) He noted that the counter narcotics strategy for 2006-2010 announced by President Berdimuhamedov also includes plans for drug treatment facilities.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Batyrov is 32 years old and became acting chief of the SCNS last month during a Cabinet reshuffle that saw former director, Murat Islamov, moved over to head the State Border Service. It is unclear whether he will be confirmed as the Agency's permanent head. He participated in two U.S. study tours in the past year, one organized by INL and the U.S. Coast Guard and another by DEA and CENTCOM. DEA Dushanbe's SA participated in the latter trip. Batyrov clearly felt comfortable working with the SA, greeting him effusively as an old friend and addressing him by his first

name. Such friendly relations are an invaluable asset in Turkmenistan where relationships form the basis for cooperation. As such, they are a testament to the value of activities such as the U.S. study trips for working with Turkmen officials. END COMMENT.

MILES